

Performance Standards Q&A

New Q&As are in red; updates to answers posted in November FAQ are in green

OVERVIEW

As of January 20, 2017, this Q&A has been updated to include the most recent questions and answers related to ACLS's proposed performance accountability framework. **(NOTE: This Q&A replaces the November Q&A, which has since been removed from our website.)**

Starting this year, ABE **programs will receive their program target for one performance standard** within Massachusetts' **proposed state performance accountability framework** – the Measurable Skills Gain (MSG) standard. MSG incorporates the following student outcomes:

- educational functioning level (EFL) completion
- high school equivalency (HSE) credential attainment
- postsecondary education and/or training enrollment after exit (PSE/T)

Programs will not be held accountable to their MSG targets in FY17 and 18. However, ACLS will collect these data in SMARTT because **ACLS is accountable to OCTAE for one of the six federal WIOA performance measures: MSG¹**.

In addition, in FY17 and 18 ACLS will report employment data as entered by programs in SMARTT to OCTAE as required. Moreover, these data will provide baseline data to inform the final state performance accountability framework to which ABE programs will be accountable in FY19.

General Questions

Q1. Is the ACLS performance standards framework final or can the field still weigh in on it?

A. It is not final. ACLS will share a final draft framework with the field for their input in late January of 2017. The performance accountability system will be piloted in FY17 and FY18, and anything that is discovered (e.g., issues, problems) will inform the system, and ACLS will adjust the standards as needed.

Q2. When will the new performance accountability system be completed and will the field have time to get trained on it?

A. Our target for completion is FY19. Training on the state performance standards has already begun. ACLS offered two webinars on the standards and will continue to offer more in the spring. ACLS will also continue to send out performance accountability-related memos to the field as its work progresses. Over the next two years, ACLS will create **state employment standards** based on the WIOA employment measures, informed by employment data programs enter into SMARTT.

Q3. Will ACLS award a different set of points for high-intensive programs vs. low-intensive programs?

A. No. Many programs have a mix of high and low intensity. Very few programs are either all low or high intensity. *Update: ACLS will not be awarding past performance points to programs.*

Q4. How do you set performance targets if we bring in three cohorts over the course of the year?

A. Based on the proposed state performance accountability framework, targets will be set once all pretesting is completed.

Q5. Will the performance standards be the same for Corrections? Will Corrections be required to do follow up in the same way?

A. The performance accountability system will be adjusted for Corrections as appropriate based on input from the ABECI Programs and based on final regulations from OCTAE.

¹ The WIOA **federal measure** for MSG is different from the **state's proposed MSG standard**. To read the federal language, see pages 47-49 of section 116 in WIOA: <https://www.congress.gov/113/bills/hr803/BILLS-113hr803enr.pdf>.

Q6. Will these measures go into effect for FY17? How will the outcomes affect the open and competitive RFP?

A. Yes, the measures are in effect this year on the federal level; ACLS is accountable to OCTAE for the federal MSG measure. See the Q&A overview above and the memo that ACLS sent to the field on January 20, 2017.

Q7. Considering EL Civics, is there any thought to setting citizenship as a performance standard?

A. ACLS recognizes that civics education is taught in many ESOL classes; however, not all students in those classes are studying for citizenship. Moreover, ACLS's goal with the new draft accountability framework was to align it with the WIOA federal measures. Citizenship attainment, like many of the accomplishments achieved by our students, is not a WIOA outcome and will not be included in the state accountability framework.

Q8. Does ACLS feel that target goals should be weighted from full-time programs to part-time programs?

A. No. The data show that program data and performance varies among all types of programs.

Q9. What is the difference between student goals, student milestones, and student outcomes?

A. "Student goals" is a term that was used in the prior performance accountability system to mean an outcome that a student achieves (e.g., get a library card, get a job, get a high school equivalency credential, and enroll in postsecondary education) and in career advising and planning. "Student milestones" was the term that the Performance Measures Task Force recommended as a way to capture outcomes that students achieve that are not included in the WIOA federal measures. **NOTE: ACLS will not include student milestones in its new framework for accountability.** "Student outcomes" is a general term used to describe a range of outcomes for students from academic to employment. (See the student outcomes shown in the overview under measurable skills gain.).

Q10. Can follow up be accomplished using social media?

A. No. Follow-up must be done by survey and in adherence to the [NRS Guidelines](#).

Q11. Is follow-up at the program level reliable?

A. Yes, as long as the program can reach the student and can verify/get the information needed. For more information, see [NRS Implementation Guidelines](#).

Q12. Are cohorts (i.e., denominators) based on students "program-wide" or students who set a goal?

A. The denominators for the performance standards are students with 12 hours of attendance and a pretest. There are no goals standards in the new performance accountability system.

Q13. Are any of the new proposed performance standards starting in FY17 or not until the next 5-year cycle (starting FY18)?

A. Federal WIOA measures are in effect now. See the Q&A overview above.

Q14. Will any of the current performance standards be dropped in FY17?

A. Yes. Programs will no longer report on the student goal performance standard, attendance, or pre/post testing percentage; however, ACLS will continue to collect and report attendance and pre/post data in SMARTT, so that programs have information to inform program design decisions.

Q15. How do you define "enrolled" in postsecondary or training when next steps happen well after gaining a diploma?

A. Enrollment is any attendance within postsecondary education or training. ACLS acknowledges that for some students, this happens well after the completion of their ABE services. However, the time-period included in the measure (from student's exit date during the fiscal year through December 31st which falls six months after the close of the fiscal year) is of interest to us as it recognizes outcomes that happen fairly soon after exit which we feel holds its own importance.

Q16. What does "credential attainment rate with special rule" mean?

A. WIOA federal measures include a special rule, and it is as follows (taken from WIOA):

The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (subject to clause (iii)), during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program. Clause iii: program participants who obtain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent shall be included in the percentage counted as meeting the criterion under such clause only if such participants, in addition to obtaining such diploma or its recognized equivalent, **have obtained or retained employment or are in an education or training program**

leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within 1 year after exit from the program. (Bold added for emphasis by ACLS.)

Q17. Our community has a high percentage of families who do not qualify for TANF and SNAP but have high levels of need. Are they left out?

A. No. All students can make EFL gains, and all students can benefit from ABE services.

Q18. Programs will now be able to accept learners with a high school equivalency who test at GLE 10.9 or lower. Will ACLS consider increasing the SPL level for ESOL classes? SPL 6 is not enough to function adequately in postsecondary education or a job.

A. If the program deems that the student cannot adequately function in postsecondary education at SPL 7, then it is recommended that the program creates a bridge class/program to give the student further opportunity to improve his/her English skills; however, the student then would need an assessment other than an ESOL test (e.g., the MAPT, TABE 9/10 Writing).

Q19. In terms of the new performance accountability framework, how does a student that exits a program but continues as a Distance Learning (DL) student “directly enrolled” count? They are continuing their education just not in class.

A. Currently, students who are directly enrolled (i.e., student attendance is captured only through the HUB) are excluded from the state performance standards. Students who are dually enrolled for more than 12 hours (i.e., attendance is captured at the CALC) are included in the performance standards. ACLS is working to define how DL students will be counted in the new performance accountability system.

Q20. Follow-up rate is not a performance issue and impacted by students who move and contact information that is no longer accurate. How will the rate account for this?

A. Follow-up rate is not a performance standard at the federal or state level.

Q21. Are there plans to include a second phone number in the student intake record? Previously there was a field for a second phone number. Sometime around FY 2012 – 2013 the alternate phone number was removed. Our experience with the SMARTT waitlist, which does have a second phone number, suggests that having a second phone number as part of the student intake record should increase our chances of successful contact during follow-up by survey.

A. ACLS is in the process of updating its intake form and will consider this change.

Q22. If I understand *Enter postsecondary education* cohort follow-up, the follow-up window for any given student could be anywhere from 6 months to 15 months, depending upon when they exited within the fiscal year. This assumes that we start following up in the first quarter following their exit. How frequently within that window will programs need to follow-up? For someone who exits in the first quarter – July to September – there are five quarters before the follow-up window closes for that cohort, on December 31 of the following fiscal year. For someone who exits in the last quarter – April to June – there are potentially two quarters within which to follow-up. In each case, how often will we be expected to contact the student? Can SMARTT do the filtering for us, so that students only appear on our list when it is appropriate to follow-up – neither too often nor not often enough?

A. Under WIOA, the reference periods are changing. ACLS is preparing guidance materials for programs.

Q23: For FY17 are we accountable for MSGs ONLY, not employment outcomes?

A: No. See the overview above.

Q24: Are performance points being assigned for FY17?

A: As outlined in ACLS’s January 20th memo, no points will be assigned in FY17 or 18. Programs are required to enter data in SMARTT for the following measures under WIOA:

- 1. 2nd Quarter Employment*
- 2. 2nd Quarter Median Earnings*
- 3. 4th Quarter Employment (FY18)*
- 4. Secondary Credential Attainment*
- 5. Entering Post Secondary Education/Training*

Please note that for the new NRS Cohort Follow Up screens being designed for SMARTT 3, programs will have the ability to follow up with students even if they are data-matched. Guidance on how to do follow up with the new measures will be provided once the new cohort screens have gone into production. Finally, be aware that for some measures, such as 4th Quarter Employment, programs will not be able to do follow up until FY18 or even FY19 due to the length of the reference period.

Q25: If we're not being measured by student goals, where do we put these data?

A: ACLS is no longer collecting goals met and set by students as a state performance standard. Programs can track this information at the program level if they choose to do so.

Q26: I've heard that attendance, average attended hours, and pre/post testing percentage are still relevant, but not in the same manner. Please explain.

A: The proposed state performance accountability framework, is focused on outcome standards rather than process standards. However, policies in the [Massachusetts Policy Manual](#) still exist for attendance, average attended hours, and pre/post testing, and must be followed. While programs must pre and post test students to determine if a student completed an Educational Functioning Level (EFL), ACLS will not track pre/post testing percentage as it did in the previous accountability system. Similarly, attended hours are relevant to EFL.

Q27. In an earlier version of this Q&A there was an answer that read "policies related to attendance, averaged attended hours and pre/post testing" will still be in place. There is confusion in the field about what that statement means. We know the data are still being collected and that no performance points will be assigned to these measures, but don't understand what "policies" are being referenced here.

A. In the proposed state performance accountability framework, attendance, average attended hours, pre/post testing, and goals performance standards are not included. See Q26.

Q28. Are programs still required to have attendance and pre-/post at 66% or above and average attended hours at or above 130? If those are still required minimums, will there be sanctions for programs that fall below those numbers? Even if the program has adequate EFL completion?

A. No, see questions 26 and 27.

Q29: Will Family Literacy programs be measured by the same standards?

A: Yes.

Q30: What are Carnegie Units?

A: They are the equivalent of high school credits in the traditional secondary school system. Some states award them in adult high schools. Since the Massachusetts ABE system does not have adult high schools, they do not apply.

Q31: Are all students in ACLS-funded programs included in the data or only core programs? What happens when a student has a primary goal in core programming and a different primary goal in a career pathways class for example?

A: The new performance standards will apply to community adult learning centers, family literacy programs, workplace education programs, ABECI programs, and Primary Instruction by Volunteer programs. The only programs that will not be held accountable to the standards are the Transition to Community College programs. The new accountability system will no longer have a goals standard.

Q32: Please explain what ACLS is considering regarding incentive funding within a cycle?

A: ACLS is considering incentive funding for programs that within a funding cycle meet or exceed their MSG target. Other states (e.g., Missouri) offer this type of funding as a way to reward programs within a cycle for targets met or exceeded.

Q33: If a student enrolls in a non-credit bearing or a pre-college ESOL type program, will that count?

A: If this question is asking whether the program would receive MSG credit for postsecondary education enrollment in these types of programs, the answer is yes. As long as the student is enrolled in a college or training program, then the program gets credit in the MSG standard. The student must, however, be exited for this to occur.

Q34: If we are not being asked to track student goals, how are we tracking entry into college and training, etc.?

A: Entry into college and training will be tracked through follow up and data matching. Student goals are no longer part of the state performance accountability system. ACLS has always tracked student entry into postsecondary education through data matching but does not currently have a data source to use in data matching for training outcomes. More information on this will be provided to programs once ACLS receives it.

Q35: In the past programs were given the guidance: “Feel free to update a student record at 1 site since we will count only unique students for NRS reporting.” Under the new performance measures, is it acceptable to follow this same guidance, or will it be a detriment to programs and the state? Assuming that this approach is OK, and that we are able to export and merge site cohort data, as we have done in the past, we should be able to create reports that allow us to focus our efforts on reaching students that are due for follow-up.

A: Yes, this is acceptable. Follow-up is a project-level activity. Therefore, we see the downloading, sorting, and merging of the data across all of your sites to ensure that the latest exit is followed for collection purposes as appropriate and believe that programs doing so are showing correct due-diligence. We applaud this approach for simplifying the follow-up work needed.

Q36: What does ACLS mean about accountability “no longer being based on points”?

A: Benchmark categories – Excellent, Advanced, Above Target, Meets Target, Needs Improvement, and Remedial Action – will be assigned instead of points. Programs will be ranked according to how close they come to meeting or exceeding their MSG target.

Q37: How should we track student outcome information since we aren't entering it in SMARTT?

A: New follow-up screens are under development for the WIOA employment measures, but should be ready prior to the timing of your data collection concerning those who were employed during the second quarter following the student’s exit quarter (data collection concerning whether employment occurred during January –March 2017 will start April 1, 2017 for students who exited during July–September 2016). You should be able to enter any postsecondary education/training outcome information through the data entry screens within the “NRS Cohort” section of the main menu for SMARTT. Programs should track all student outcomes in SMARTT.

Q38: Are programs being measured in each individual category or all together on average?

A: If by category, you are asking if programs will get credit for EFL, HSE credential obtainment, and PSE enrollment after exit separately, then no. There is one standard called measurable skills gain (MSG). There are three ways in which a program can earn an MSG: EFL completion through pre- and post- testing, high school equivalency credential obtainment, or post-exit entry into postsecondary education or training.

Q39. Doesn’t data matching have to be improved?

A. Issues with data matching arise when data at a program level are not entered correctly (e.g., misspelled names, wrong dates are entered, students change names without telling the program). Also, agencies (e.g., DUA) with whom ACLS does data matching do not data match all that ACLS needs (e.g., National Student Clearinghouse does not data match certificate programs).

Q40. The answer to Q39 mentions that one cause of unmatched data – data that would otherwise have been matched – is when a student changes his or her name, but doesn’t tell the program. This is just a reminder that SMARTT does not allow editing of exited student names. We sometimes learn of a name change, but in the case of an exited student, there is no way for us to make that change in SMARTT.

A. Although the use of data matching helps identify many outcomes, not all outcomes are able to be captured through this method. Programs are responsible for following up with their students to find out if post-exit outcomes have been met in cases where alternative methods such as data matching fail to identify outcomes. ACLS is working to develop new follow up data entry screens in SMARTT that will allow programs to document outcomes for all exited students including those for which a potential later data match is possible. Previously, data entry was limited to the documentation by programs of those students who did not have the potential for data matching due to their not signing the release of information form and/or did not provide their social security number. Removal of that limitation will make it easier for programs to report outcomes.

Q41. If a student exits one ESE-funded site and enrolls in another ESE-funded site, is that really an exit as far as NRS Cohorts are concerned? In other words, is the first site responsible for following up, even though the student is current somewhere in the state? If the answer is no, will the follow-up screens in SMARTT exclude students that are current at some other site within the state? I believe that our program sees a disproportionate number of this sort of exit. We have multiple sites that are within 10 miles or less of each other. It is not uncommon for students to transfer from one site to another within the year, or to end one year at one site and start the next at another.

A. Yes, and yes. If a student exits a program and enrolls in another, then the first program is responsible for that student's outcomes (i.e., the student will show up on that program's follow-up report). ACLS is aware that site-level reporting is a challenge especially for multi-site programs, but at this time, SMARTT is unable to report at the project level.

Webinar Questions

Q1. Will there be trainings on EFL and the other new standards?

A. There will be webinars providing information on the new performance accountability system, which includes information on the EFL standard.

Update: ACLS hosted two webinars in December of 2016 and plans to host EFL trainings in the form of webinars in the spring of 2017. As ACLS develops additional performance standards, related webinars will be offered. The December 2016 webinars can be found on both the [ACLS performance standards webpage](#) and [SABES' ACLS webpage](#).

Q2. Will SABES offer training on EFLs?

A. ACLS will work with SABES on assessing the needs of the field around EFLs.

Update: In addition, ACLS will be offering EFL webinars in the spring of 2017.

Q3: Will ACLS be doing a similar webinar regarding employment outcomes?

A: Yes, after the pilot, ACLS will use the data gathered from programs to inform employment standards. ACLS would then host webinars to train the field on this information.

Assessment Questions

Q1. If programs hold off on pretesting, how would this affect their performance points?

A. The ACLS assessment policy will not change; programs must still pretest students according to the policies in the assessment policy manuals found on ACLS's [Assessment page](#).

Update: ACLS will not be awarding past performance points to programs. Under the MSG standard, programs will be given a target after all pre-testing is completed for the fiscal year.

Q2. Massachusetts assess with the MAPT, but it is not aligned with the HiSET, so which do we use as our target in designing curriculum?

A. Curricula should be aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRSAE).

Q3. What does MSG stand for?

A. Measurable Skills Gain

Q4. What incentive is there for programs to post test if the pre/post testing process standard is no longer a performance standard?

A. See question 26.

Q5. Has ACLS done a comparison of EFL completions with assessment tools other than the approved assessments? Has OCTAE?

A. No. No.

Q6. Has ACLS run a comparison on how well students make EFLs on the MAPT and the TABE?

A. No. Currently, the MAPT is fully aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

Q7. Is the MAPT “harder” than the tests other states use? If EFL completions for ESOL are better than those for ABE, could ABE programs be allowed to use other NRS-approved assessments other than the MAPT?

A. MAPT is more aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education than other tests, and therefore, a better tool for assessing whether a student is college and career ready. Massachusetts is not looking to use another assessment other than the MAPT.

Q8. Could ACLS check in with more than just a couple of states on what they have in place for EFL and for their other performance standards?

A. Yes

Q9. Is the formula for calculating program targets based on all students or only students who were pre- and post-tested?

A. For the EFL performance standard, the target will be based on all students who are pretested and have 12 hours of attendance.

Update: ACLS has since changed the EFL performance standard to the MSG standard, which incorporates EFL completion.

Q10. How does the focus on EFL completion/progression affect enrollment? Why not look at student growth for the time period when students were in the program, not within one fiscal year?

A. OCTAE requires that states report EFL completion rates within the fiscal year.

Q11. Will our state get sanctioned if our EFL numbers remain low (lower than the targets set by OCTAE)?

A. EFL completion factors into overall state performance. Overall, poor state performance could result in sanctions.

Q12. Could programs have a choice as to whether they use the MAPT? Could another standardized assessment be used for ABE students?

A. Programs must use the MAPT if they have ABE students/classes. The only exception is made with the ABE CI programs since some of the jails and prisons do not have Internet access for inmates.

Q13. What is the rationale for “ditching” meaningful gain for the arbitrary NRS lines/thresholds?

A. EFL is used throughout the country and is one of the federal measures for ABE. Also, ACLS is still working on the new accountability framework; a final decision has not been made on what this will look like.

Q14. Will programs pre- and post-test students as usual?

A. Yes. The assessment policies will not change.

Q15: Is pretest and posttest percentage completion still measured?

A: See question 26. Pre/post testing percentage will be shown in Cognos reports but will no longer be a performance standard.

Q16: Will SMARTT ever be able to offer the Educational Functioning Level (EFL) along with test scores once we enter them?

A: Thank you for this suggestion. Right now, SMARTT cannot do this.

Q17: Will a college assessment be a consideration? Like the accuplacer?

A: No. The ACCUPLACER is not a federally-approved assessment. Also, the ACCUPLACER is a placement test, not a test to measure student gain.

Q18: Gain in a non-primary assessment area will count in the state system but not in the federal system under WIOA? Is this correct?

A: Correct. Gains in a non-primary assessment will count toward bonus credit in the state system and will not count at all in the federal system.

Q19: I understand that reading should be tested in STAR classes, but why can't we choose math as primary assessment area if that is what our students want to be assessed in?

A: For STAR classes, reading is the primary assessment for students. These data help us to assess how well STAR is working for students, but also because the main focus for these classes is reading. ACLS is considering revising this policy in the future.

Q20: Will students who disappear without post-testing be exempted from the state performance accountability system?

A: Only if they have fewer than 12 hours of attendance during the fiscal year.

Q21: Will ABE/ASE students who pretest above 600 be included in target projections?

A: Yes.

Q22. What is the guidance on analyzing EFL data based on the TABE CLAS-E test when a raw score indicates an SPL of X+?

A. ACLS understands the issue with the CLAS E assessments and we will follow up with OCTAE on this question at which point we hope we can give the field more guidance.

Q23. How can one possibly measure a 7-hour week program with the same expectation for EFL progress as a 20-hour week program? Students with more instructional time make faster progress.

A. Every program will be assigned an MSG target based on the number of students pre-tested into each of the program's NRS levels, not the hours of intensity.

Q24. When will Table 4 (EFL gain targets) be sent to programs?

A. ACLS sent the tool to ABE program staff who attended the performance standards session at the ABE Directors' Meeting; the tool was sent out in June.

Update: Since last year's ABE Directors' Meeting, ACLS has changed the EFL standard into the MSG standard, and the EFL target tool is now the MSG target tool. Those who attended either of the two webinars in December 2016 had access to the MSG tool as well as all of the documents presented in the webinar.

Q25. Why the changes in performance standards points when you have so much to work out? Why not add the EFL completion and others to existing performance points?

A. ACLS and the Performance Measures Task Force recognized the need to closely align the Massachusetts accountability system with WIOA federal measures. The current system was created in 2006; much has changed in terms of what students need to get to their next steps. Also, in the past, programs were not aware of how Massachusetts fared in terms of federal accountability; the new accountability framework is more aligned with the federal accountability system.

Update: ACLS will not be awarding past performance points to programs. Under the MSG standard, programs will be given a target after all pre-testing is completed for the fiscal year.

Q26. What is the difference between EFL progression and EFL completion?

A. They are synonymous terms.

Q27. What will be the denominator for the EFL performance standard: all students with 12 hours of attendance or only those students with a pretest?

A. The denominator will be all students with at least 12 hours of attendance and a pretest.

Update: ACLS has since changed the EFL performance standard to the MSG standard, which incorporates EFL completion.

Q28. If some programs – smaller programs -- only tested those students that they think would make gains, then couldn't this cause a program to do better on EFL than a program that's larger and not able to hold back on testing?

A. Each year programs sign the Statement of Assurances that commit to data collection and assessment policies. To ignore these policies could result in loss of funding.

Q29. Can you examine other states' proficiency tests to ensure our tests are similar?

A. Several years ago, Massachusetts examined all NRS-approved assessments and selected those that most closely aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. ACLS has always aimed to ensure that its state standardized assessments

were aligned to what students needed to know to be successful on their paths to college and career readiness. ACLS could examine other states' tests; however, the goal is not to align with other states, but rather to align to the CCRSAE.

Q30. What cohort do you base program targets on? First group? Second term? Third? Fourth?

A. Program targets for EFL will be based on five years of past data from all programs in the state and the number of students who pre-test into each of the NRS levels that the program has. This is a weighted target; it creates a level-playing field for programs that serve students in what historically have been hard-to-serve NRS EFLs.

Update: ACLS has since changed the EFL performance standard to the MSG standard, which incorporates EFL completion as one of three outcomes included in that standard.

Q31: In regard to FY16 NRS Cohort C follow-up: Is there a template available which lists the specific information required on each student? Maybe a document that lists specific data we are required to collect? Is it just entry into what, where and when?

A: *The SMARTT screen is the template; no additional template exists. The data required is only "what" and "when," not "where." In the November 2016 ACLS mailing, found here: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/mailings/>, there is a link to a tutorial -- <https://smartthelp.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/217000866-Steps-for-FY16-NRS-Cohort-C-Follow-Up-Entry-into-Postsecondary-Education-or-Training> -- that provides the information that you need.*

Q32. If we post-test an ABE student in both reading and math, how will you determine whether EFL progression/completion has been met?

A. EFL progression will be based on student performance in the student's primary assessment area.

Clarification: ACLS has since changed the EFL performance standard to the MSG standard, which incorporates EFL completion as one of three outcomes included in that standard.

Q33: We were notified on November 16th that we can no longer change a primary assessment area... just wondering why?

A: *By allowing programs to change the students' primary assessment area during the fiscal year after the primary assessment area had been set at the beginning of the instructional cycle, ACLS was not in compliance with National Reporting System (NRS) standardized assessment guidelines. ACLS was required by OCTAE to rectify this.*

Q34. With changes to eligibility that can include those with HS credentials testing 10.9 (they will be high ASE), how will we show gains?

A. *The low ASE range is GLE 9.0 to 10.9. The high ASE is GLE 11.0 to 12.9. Any student, except those with a high school equivalency credential, with a primary assessment below GLE 11.0, could complete the low ASE EFL (i.e., show gain).*

Q35. Higher level ESOL students are currently assessed using the TABE CLAS-E in our program because we feel it is a better measure (Advanced or Career Pathways). Sometimes they score a SPL 6 at pre-test and it's not possible to make an EFL gain with that test. What to do?

A. *A scale score of 612 and above in CLAS-E Writing Level 4 (both Forms A and B) is the exit criteria for students in the Advanced ESL level. Once students attain a score of 612, they need to exit the program at the end of the fiscal year if their primary assessment area is ESOL Writing. The same policy applies for ESOL Reading. A scale score of 588 and above in CLAS-E Reading Level 4 (both Forms A and B) is the exit criteria for students in the Advanced ESL level. Once students attain a score of 588, they may not remain in the program the following fiscal year if their primary assessment area is ESOL Reading.*

Q36. If a student takes the TABE CLAS-E level 2 test, scores to be advanced to level 3 test but does not make the number of gain points due to change in tests, how will this work now?

A. *Programs must follow the ACLS policies on retesting when CLAS-E pre-test scores are within certain ranges. If students are scoring too high in the pre-test, they should be re-tested as per the Massachusetts Policy Manual*

(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/assessment/CLAS-EWritingPolicy.pdf>, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/assessment/CLAS-EReadingPolicy.pdf>). In the situation of a post-test at a higher level, EFL completion is determined if the student has gained enough points to move into the next NRS level.

Update: ACLS will not be awarding past performance points to programs. Under the MSG standard, programs will be given a target after all pre-testing is completed for the fiscal year.

Q37. What is the research base that NRS levels are based on?

A. To find out more information on the National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education and NRS levels, please visit the NRS website at: <http://www.nrsweb.org/>.

Q38. Other states have been using the TABE 9/10. Has there been a study to compare gains from 9/10 in MA vs. gains from MAPT?

A. No. The MAPT is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and will soon be aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRSAE). The TABE is not aligned with either.

Q39. Why is Massachusetts so below other states in EFL completions for ABE?

A. Regardless of how Massachusetts compares to other states, the completion rates for all Massachusetts have not moved over the years. Massachusetts's EFL and learner gains have remained mostly flat over the years.

Q40. Has a study been made of the MAPT cut points and their alignment with GLE ranges? Poor alignment is the most probable reason for Massachusetts' low ABE performance in relationship to other states.

A. The MAPT is fully aligned to the National Reporting System (NRS) Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs) and was specifically built to measure the content of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. No NRS approved assessment, including those used in other states, is specifically aligned to GLE ranges.

The MAPT cut points currently in place were the result of three studies involving ABE teachers and were obtained through the process of standard setting designed to demarcate the points on the MAPT score scale that align to the exact NRS EFL descriptions. The participants in the standard setting meeting used the level descriptions to evaluate items and recommend the cuts between levels on the MAPT scale.

Massachusetts ABE is a standards-based system. Programs must ensure that their curriculum and instruction are aligned to the College and Career Readiness standards in order to increase opportunities for their students to produce measurable outcomes as determined by the MAPT.

Q41. If learning gains do not matter for standards purposes, then what is the risk of students who make a significant learning gain (401-499) mattering little or nothing compared to students who go from 499 to 501 (2 points gain)?

A. There is no risk associated with students who make meaningful learning gains but do not make EFL completion. Adult education (title II of the WIOA legislation) is measured on EFL completion and MA reports on EFL completion based on negotiated EFL targets with OCTAE.

Q42. Where and when will the FY17 EFL score ranges for the different assessments be posted? The learner gain standard is effective in measuring students' progress. Please explain why this cannot be kept as a performance standard together with EFL.

A. ACLS chose not to create a new performance accountability system with two standards that essentially both measure student academic progress; this caused confusion in the field in the previous accountability system. Therefore, ACLS has decided to create a standard that aligns with the WIOA federal measures (i.e., Measurable Skills Gain, which includes Educational Functioning Level completion).

Q43: Where can programs find the EFL numbers for gains?

A: There is no stand-alone EFL performance standard. EFL completion is one of the three outcomes that a student can achieve as part of the MSG standard. Cognos MSG reports are being developed and will be available in FY18.

Q44: Can one student be credited with two gains: diploma and postsecondary education enrollment?

A: Yes. Students will be credited for one full measurable skill gain for the first outcome and for a fraction of a measurable skill gain for the second.

Q45: Can ESOL students achieve an MSG by receiving a secondary credential?

A: Yes.

Q46: What is the scale? Could you break it down to three ways of achieving the EFL gain?

A: EFL completion can be achieved when a student, through pre and post testing, moves from one NRS level into a higher NRS level. If the student moves up two levels, then that student has completed two EFLs.

Q47: How many years' historical data are used to determine difficulty of each NRS level?

A: In a recent ACLS webinar with the field, for the purposes of showing participants how a program would receive its target had ACLS had the Measurable Skill Gain (MSG) standard in FY15, ACLS used five years (i.e., FY11-FY15) of historical data to show the difficulty of completing NRS levels for its MSG performance standard.

Q48: Are ESOL students who pre-test into Advanced ESL exempted from the MSG standard?

A: No, because those students can achieve an MSG outcome by obtaining a high school equivalency credential or enrolling in postsecondary education after exit.

Q49: Are students who pre-test into High ASE exempt from the MSG standard?

A: No. The MSG standard is comprised of EFL completion, HSE credential obtainment, and PSE enrollment. Although an EFL completion cannot be earned by students who pretested into High ASE, opportunities for earning the HSE credential or enrolling into PSE after exit still exist.

Q50: Will program targets be set at a particular point in the year (a snapshot), or are they continually adjusted as new students (pre-tests) are added throughout the year?

A: Program MSG targets will be set once all pretesting has been completed for the year.

Q51: If an MSG target is not calculated until all students have completed pretests, what happens with programs that have ongoing enrollment? Does the target keep changing throughout the year?

A: The MSG target will be set once all pretesting has been completed for the year; therefore, if a program has ongoing (i.e., open) enrollment, the target won't be set until after the last pretest has been completed.

Q52: How do we find our MSG target? We have pre-tested most students, but we still will take new students.

A: Programs will be given their target after all pretesting has been completed. ACLS will be creating new reports in Cognos to show programs their MSG targets; the final target by which program performance will be measured will be assigned after all pretesting has occurred for the year.

Q53: For High ASE students, is EFL completion based solely on high school credential obtainment or postsecondary education enrollment?

A: For students that test into the highest NRS levels for ABE and ESOL, high school equivalency credential obtainment and postsecondary enrollment are the two MSG outcomes that those students could achieve.

Q54: TABE CLAS-E Reading has no completion score for Advanced ESL. If students pre-test into that level are they required to switch primary assessments?

A: ACLS's policy on primary assessments does not allow for the switching of a student's primary assessment during the year. Students at this level can achieve an outcome under the MSG standard by either obtaining their HSE credential or enrolling into post-secondary education or training.

Q55: Is MSG based on past performance? If we do well one year, would we have to do even better the next year?

A: MSG targets are based on a weighted formula that factors both the difficulty of completing NRS levels and is based on the number of students who pretest into each of the NRS levels that a program has; therefore, each year a program's MSG target will change. It may be higher in one year than a previous year; however, it could also be lower.

Q56: Are we tracking the MGS by completing the student goals section in SMARTT?

A: No. ACLS is no longer tracking or measuring student goals set and met as it had done in previous funding cycles. MSG outcomes are tracked in SMARTT through data matching or follow up or both.

Q57: Could you explain what "0.1 of one MSG" means? I need an example.

A: If a program has a student that completes one EFL, but also obtains a high school equivalency credential, then that program will have one MSG outcome and also a fraction (e.g., .1) of an additional outcome factored into the program's overall target percent.

Q58: If a student doesn't make a gain in her primary assessment area but does so in the other assessment area, does the program get bonus credit?

A: Yes. The program would get a fraction of credit for the EFL completion.

Q59: If a person completes two MSGs, why aren't they simply counted as two MSGs in our data?

A: Because then a program could do well based only on a subpopulation of students. This would not be fair for some programs. The main aim of the MSG standard is to reward success based on the approximate proportion of students achieving at least one educational outcome. To preserve that aim, the earning additional outcomes should be limited to fractional credits. Otherwise, the standard would be skewed towards never detecting underperformance since equal credits for additional outcomes by some students would be able to completely make up for the lack of even a single outcome by other students.

Q60: When will the MSG standard be implemented?

A: The state MSG performance standard will be implemented in FY19; FY17 and 18 are pilot years for this standard. On the federal level, however, Massachusetts is accountable to OCTAE for the WIOA MSG measure in FY17 and beyond.

Q61: Can you explain how the MSG bonus credit will be calculated into our outcomes?

A: Students who earn additional measurable skills gains beyond their first and/or earn additional EFLs beyond their first if the posttest was in the student's primary area or additional EFLs including their first if posttest was in any non-primary area are awarded 0.1 of a measurable skill gain for each.

Q62: What are the current MSG measurements for FY17?

A: For the state MSG standard, targets are not determined until all students are pre-tested. Information concerning performance for FY17 will be available on January 1, 2018, the first day following the end of the reference periods for HSE credential obtainment and post-exit enrollment into postsecondary or training.

Q63: How many programs exceeded their MSG targets and how many didn't?

A: Since the MSG targets will be given to programs in FY17 after all pretesting has been completed, ACLS does not have data on which programs exceeded and which did not.

Q64: It seems a bit harsh to begin this new system with a requirement to get at least 90% or be in remediation. Like every kid in a class who gets lower than an A fails. Would ACLS consider lowering the percentages?

A: ACLS is piloting the State Performance Accountability Framework in FY17 and FY18; ACLS will consider changes to the standards after the pilot period. Moreover, the target needs to be set high enough for Massachusetts to meet its federal target set by OCTAE. Also, student outcomes have been flat for several years in Massachusetts, and ACLS is looking to improve these outcomes so that students can go on to their next steps and ultimately achieve family-sustaining wages.

Q65: Are the MSG charts already available in Cognos?

A: No.

Q66: If an ESOL student does not achieve an EFL completion in her primary assessment, but does enroll in college, does she receive MSG credit?

A: Yes, only if the enrollment into college occurred after her exit from ABE.

Q67: Are students in High ASE exempt from the MSG formula?

A: No.

Q68: MSG Reference Period for HSE is 12/31 following the end of the FY. Does that mean our performance for the fiscal year isn't finalized until that time?

A: Yes.

Q69: MSG Reference Period for PSE/T is any time between a student's exit date and 12/31. Is that 12/31 of the calendar year or 12/31 following the end of the fiscal year?

A: It is 12/31 following the end of the fiscal year.

Q70: Is there an advantage to catching students for post-testing if they just passed the HiSET?

A: Bonus credit can be earned if the student, through a posttest, earns an EFL completion.

Q71: Is HSE credential obtainment part of the MSG standard equally valued for ESOL and ABE programs?

*A: In terms of how it is counted for the proposed **state** performance accountability framework, yes.*

Q72: Could the EFL gains be measured over years? For example, our students are often with us for three years and go up two or three levels over that time, but not necessarily one level each year.

A: EFL gains are a component of the Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) state performance standard which will be measured each year.

Q73: Is High School Equivalency credential a stand-alone gain?

A: No. Under the state performance accountability system, high school equivalency credential obtainment is one of three possible ways students can show measurable skill gains.

Q74: Does High School Equivalency include High School Diploma?

A: Yes, if earned while in the ABE program or by December 31 following the close of the fiscal year the student last attended.

Q75: If a student doesn't improve one NRS level but earns a high school diploma, is that considered a gain?

A: Yes, as long as the earning of the diploma occurred during the student's ABE participation or by December 31 following the fiscal year the student last attended.

Q76: Does the EFL gain tools include MAPT, TABE, Best Plus 2.0, and CLAS-E?

A: Yes.

Q77: Does the student have to guess correctly which area she will move up a level in to have the movement count? (e.g., if math on the MAPT is designated rather than reading, but the reading score goes up a level and the math doesn't, does the reading score count as a gain)?

A: It is not clear what is meant by "guess." Students can be tested in more than one skill area with one of these areas selected as the primary assessment at the beginning of the instructional cycle. If MAPT math is the student's primary assessment area and the student was also tested with MAPT Reading (which would then become the student's non-primary assessment area), the gain that the student made in reading would count towards the program's MSG bonus even though the student didn't make gain in the primary assessment area (math).

Q78: What if a student makes huge gains but doesn't pass to the next EFL – does it count for an MSG in the state performance accountability system?

A: No.

Q79: Does a student need to just get their HSE credential to get their gain?

A: MSG does not encompass any stand-alone component; it includes the following outcomes by students: EFL completion through pre- and post- testing, completion of the high school equivalency credential, or post-exit entry into postsecondary education or training.

Q80: Are MSG targets adjusted as new students come in and are tested and others drop out?

A: MSG targets are not assigned until after a program has pretested all of its students for the fiscal year. The students who count toward MSG target are those who, at any time during the fiscal year, completed 12 or more hours of instruction. Students who pretest during the fiscal year but do not attain at least 12 hours of attendance within instruction will be removed.

Q81: Will the number of instructional hours a program offers be factored into the target?

A: If a student has 12 or more hours of attendance, then he/she is eligible for measurement by the MSG standard. Students who complete a pretest but do not attain at least 12 hours of attendance will not be factored into the program target.

Q82: Will a percent of a program's MSG target be looked at instead of a strict line above or below 100% target?

A: Yes.

Q83: Programs may not finish testing until late in the year - when do we stop?

A: A program's MSG target will be assigned after the program finishes all of its post-testing; therefore, the program could stop as late as June 30 of any year.

Q84: Exactly who calculates a program's MSG target?

A: ACLS assigns the program targets to all programs at the end of the fiscal year after all pre-testing has been completed. ACLS's Cognos reports, which will present the information related to program performance on the MSG standard, will incorporate the basic formula used for assigning MSG targets.

Q85: If we can only select one primary assessment, how do you recognize gain in a second assessment?

A: Gains in a second assessment will be credited by the MSG standard bonus structure which assigns 0.1 of one MSG credit as bonus for each additional gain in a second assessment area.

Q86: So since the FY ends June 30, do students then need to be enrolled in PSE or training by that same December to count?

A: If the student exited during the fiscal year, then yes they would need to be enrolled in PSE or training by the first December 31st following the fiscal year close date of June 30th to receive credit under this way of earning an MSG.

Q87: Can one person earn two bonuses of .1? (e.g., if a student makes an EFL gain, gets a high school diploma, and then enters postsecondary education)?

A: Yes. Or more.

Q88: For the MSG bonus credit, .1 seems very low, can that make a difference?

A: Yes, especially if students earn more than one bonus. For example, a student could move up by 2 EFLs in the non-primary assessment area and also have earned his/her high school equivalency credential. All three of these would be bonus if the initial MSG was met by completing an EFL in the primary assessment area. In such cases, the totals from the bonuses would be 0.3.

Q89: Is there a spreadsheet that shows how benchmarks relate to assigning bonus credits?

A: Once all the regular and bonus credits from the MSG standard have been factored into the program's MSG performance percentage, a comparison of this is made to the assigned program target to determine the performance benchmark. When the comparison shows that a program achieved at least 135% of their program target a benchmark of "Excellent" is awarded. When the comparison shows 120-134%, a benchmark of "Advanced" is awarded. "Above Target" corresponds to 110-119%, "Meets Standard" corresponds to 100-109%, "Needs Improvement" corresponds to 90-99%, and anything below 90% corresponds to "Remedial Action."

Q90: Will a program's performance in MSG outweigh their performance in an employment standard?

A: ACLS will be releasing information related to the employment standards at a later date. As of December 2016, ACLS has created one performance standard: MSG. After the pilot years of FY17 and FY18, ACLS will have collected enough baseline employment data from programs to create employment standards aligned with the WIOA federal employment measures. In terms of assigning weight to the standards, ACLS will assign more weight to MSG; however, at this time, ACLS does not know how much more weight.

Q91: How does the MSG standard fit with the employment outcomes?

A: Employment outcomes will be measured within a separate set of standards that will be released in FY2019.

Q92: Will there be discussion regarding benchmarks for the second two MSGs (HS and PSE/T)? How are benchmarks set?

A: Additional MSGs earned by students are counted toward the bonus credit for the MSG standard. This bonus credit brings up the MSG percentage for a program. Since benchmarking is based only on the comparison of the program's MSG percentage (which will have the bonus credit already factored in) to their target, there is no need for other sets of benchmarks related to the program's performance on the MSG standard.

Q93: I thought that HSE wouldn't count unless student also enrolled in college or training. Is that a federal WIOA thing or totally wrong?

A: You are correct that, according to the WIOA special rule (see Q20) for credential obtainment, high school equivalency credentials only count if the student exited and then entered postsecondary education or training or was employed at some point within one year of their exit. However, ACLS is not holding programs to that rule within the proposed state accountability framework.

Q94: Was the target tool shown in the webinar only for EFLs?

A: No, the target tool includes all of the outcomes measured in the MSG standard: EFL completion, HSE credential obtainment, and PSE enrollment after student exit from ABE.

Q95: Sounds like EFL completion will count all test areas regardless of whether they are a primary assessment area (PAA) or not? Yes?

A: EFL completion from one level to the next highest level counts as a full credit for the MSG when determined by pre- and post- testing within the primary assessment area. EFL completions beyond the next level within the primary assessment area will be counted as bonus credit. Any EFL completions within non-primary assessment areas will count as bonus credit.

Social Security Number (SSN) Questions

Q1. Will there be any excluded populations from performance measures (e.g., students who do not provide an SSN or who have fewer than six years of education in their native language)?

A. No. ACLS will revisit this decision after the pilot year (FY17). Reporting will be aligned to federal reporting requirements.

Q2. Will programs need to do follow up on students who provide an SSN?

A. For the enter postsecondary education (PSE) cohort follow up, ACLS only has the ability to data match for higher education enrollment; data matching doesn't capture enrollment in training programs. The only way to show that outcome is through follow up. In addition, the National Student Clearinghouse, through which ACLS data matches student PSE outcomes, does not use SSNs for data matching; they use student name, date of birth, and other personal information.

For employment cohorts, students that provide an SSN will be data matched through the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) starting in FY17. Self-employed students do not show up through data matching; therefore, follow up is required to capture that outcome.

Q3. If my students do not provide an SSN, then how will I get points for the employment measures?

A. In Massachusetts, we do not require that students give SSNs upon enrollment in an ABE program; therefore, if a student does not provide an SSN, the program will need to do follow up after that student exits the program.

Update: ACLS will not be awarding past performance [points](#) to programs.

Q4. How will programs follow up on students who do not provide an SSN?

A. When an SSN is not provided and/or a release of information form is not signed by a student, follow up must be conducted through email, phone, or another form of contact.

Q5. Do we still need to do follow-up if the student provides an SSN? Won't this happen through data matching?

A. If a student does not sign a release of inform form, the program will need to do follow-up. SSNs are only used for matching purposes on the employment measures. Postsecondary enrollment outcomes are matched through the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), but ACLS still encourages follow up to ensure that all data are counted.

Q6: Most of our students don't provide SSNs. Can we report if they enroll in PSE training?

A: Yes. The program would then need to track student outcome data through follow up.

Q7: If students are being tracked by SSNs, will we get a report from ACLS to know what their gains are?

A: Students are not being tracked by SSNs; however, data matching uses SSNs to track outcome data related to employment. ACLS will be creating a data dashboard as a way for programs to see their student outcome data in real time.

Q8: If students don't provide an SSN and enroll in postsecondary training, can we count their achievement? Could we count them in our attendance and gains outcome performance?

A: Outcome data on students who do not sign the release of information will be tracked through follow up by the program. Since there are no more process standards like attendance and average attended hours, programs cannot count students using these (former) standards. In terms of gains as in EFLs, those students would be counted if they make EFL gains.

Q9: Can we count students who do not provide an SSN or who cannot work in the US in attendance and/or gains?

A: No. There are no longer state performance standards on attendance and learner gains. Attendance for all students, however, must be recorded in SMARTT. ACLS is still collecting attendance data as well as data on average attended hours and pre/post testing.

Q10: Is there any possibility that, in addition to SSNs, Taxpayer Identification Numbers (TINs) could be used to data match?

A: No. Right now, only an SSN can be used.

Employment and Postsecondary Education/Training Questions

Q1. How can ESE ensure that the MCAS testing policies that cause lags between completion of class work and judgment of portfolios doesn't keep students from skills training or PSE enrollment?

A. ACLS will continue to work with the K-12 system to align and streamline policies.

Q2. Is there a wage level or number of work hours required to count as employment in the federal employment measures?

A. Students who earned any wages during the quarter of reference (second quarter following the quarter of exit, or fourth quarter following the quarter of exit for our employment and median earnings measures) will count.

Q3. What counts as postsecondary education (e.g., community college, voc/tech training, certificate, transitions)?

A. Yes. All of the examples are considered postsecondary education.

Q4. Will low-level learners be required to get a job upon exiting a program?

A. For the federal employment measures, the expectations are the same for all students. The employment measures capture whether a student is employed in the second and/or fourth quarter after exit. Programs should work with students to get them the education and next steps that they need that will lead to a family- or self-sustaining wage.

Q5. How does this new framework take into account students who start in a program with jobs?

A. The federal employment measures track whether a student has a job in the second and fourth quarters after exit. Whether a student enters the program with or without a job does not factor into this standard.

Q6. Do programs get credit for student drop outs for employment?

A. If a student is employed during the second quarter after exiting the program and then again in the fourth quarter after exit, then the outcome will be met for that student whether or not he/she dropped out or stopped out of the program.

Q7. How will employment info be collected?

A. Follow-up screens will show listings of students who have exited. Data entry staff will be able to select from the listings and be presented the relevant contact information as well as the timeframe for which the student will be asked regarding when they had employment.

Q8. Why is the Fourth Quarter Employment rate a program accountability measure, and not a student accountability measure? A program can fantastically prepare a student who can fantastically fail due to circumstances (that we can't program design for).

A. WIOA seeks to ensure that the workforce system is job-driven and matches employers with skilled individuals. Therefore, Massachusetts seeks to measure whether or not the skills students acquire from your services enhances their ability to obtain and retain employment.

Q9. Against which data do you measure median earnings? Based geographically? Per position? Per employee skill set? Following federal guidelines? State guidelines?

A. OCTAE has just released its final guidance related to the WIOA measures. ACLS hopes to provide more information related to this question over the next couple of months.

Q10. How long after a student graduates (or stops out) does his/her employment gain count?

A. As required by WIOA, ACLS seeks to find out whether students had employment during the second and fourth quarters following the quarter of their exit.

Q11. What about students who need to get their lives in order (e.g., need transportation, childcare, etc.) so that they can access post secondary or become gainfully employed? (I mean those who take a year or more to get that done after they attain a HiSET)?

A. ACLS acknowledges that for some students, this happens well after the completion of their ABE services. However, the time-period included in the measure (from student's exit date during the fiscal year through December 31st which falls six months after the close of the fiscal year) is of interest to us as it recognizes outcomes that happen fairly soon after exit which we feel holds its own importance.

Q12. What happens to our students when they leave us? It will be nice to have a clear pathway for our students to move out of ABE into jobs and PSE.

A. ABE programs are encouraged to engage in regional career pathway planning with WIOA partners to develop clear pathways for students leaving ABE programs (e.g., postsecondary education, certificate programs, and jobs.) ACLS funds Transition to Community College programs and Adult Career Pathways programs both of which are viable next steps for students in addition to services provided by One-Stop-Career-Centers available to ABE students seeking employment.

Q13. Does employment include part time?

A. Yes. Any employment will count.

Q14. How do we measure effectiveness in serving employers? Who measures this?

A. There is currently a group of state-level stakeholders who are working to create a measure for this. More information will be provided as ACLS learns more and the work of this group is finalized.

Q15. Are earnings and employment self reported? Does there have to be proof of income/employment?

A. Students who provide their social security number and also sign a confidentiality release of information form will not be required to be followed up for the employment measures.

Q16. Please clarify the acceptable postsecondary education (PSE) enrollment.

A. PSE enrollment means enrollment in college (e.g., community colleges, including enrollment in ESE-funded Transition programs, and 4-year) and certificate programs. OCTAE will provide further guidance to states on this.

Q17. Please define by calendar all quarters. What if a person is accounted for in the second quarter employment rate but loses the job before retaining to the fourth quarter? How is performance measured then?

A. Four time periods comprise the quarters that together form the calendar year: January – March, April – June, July – September, and October – December. If a person earned wages during the second quarter following their exit quarter, programs will receive credit for the Second Quarter Employment Rate measure. If a person earned wages during the fourth quarter following their exit quarter, programs will receive credit for the Fourth Quarter Employment Rate measure. No credit is earned in cases where the person did not have any earned wages during the reference quarter.

Q18: For PSE/T, if a student's exit date is December 20th, does he/she then only have 11 days to enroll in PSE/T?

A: No, since this way of earning a measurable skill gain (MSG) would be credited if the student enrolled in PSE/T by the following December 31st. The timeframe for this is always from the student's exit date to the fiscal year end date of June 30th plus the first six months following that end date which ends on December 31st.

Q19: If a student exits on 5/15/16; then enters PSE/T on 9/9/16, does this count as an MSG? What about if a student exits on December 27th?

A: If the student exited on 5/15/16, then yes, an entry date into PSE/T on 9/9/16 counts as an MSG. If the student exited on 12/27/15, then yes, an entry date into PSE/T on 9/9/16 counts as an MSG. If the student exited on 12/27/16, then no, an entry date into PSE/T on 9/9/16 does not count as an MSG since the student must exit from ABE first.

Q20: If a student obtains a high school equivalency credential, but does not get a job (i.e., the special rule), then does a program get credit at the state level but not at the federal or what?

A: Credit will be given at the state level if the completion of the high school credential occurs on or prior to 12/31 following the close of the fiscal year. At the federal level, credit will be earned for the MSG standard if the student completed the high school equivalency credential by the close the fiscal year (i.e., by 6/30). There is another federal measure, Credential Obtainment, that states that only High and Low ASE-level students who earn their high school equivalency credential during their ABE participation or within 365 days following their exit date and meet at least one condition of the special rule requiring that either the student have employment or have attendance in postsecondary education/training at some point within 365 days following their exit to be counted.

Q21: Will self-employed students be data matched?

A: A program would need to follow up on students who are self-employed.

Q22: Is enrollment in a community college Transitions program counted as postsecondary education?

A: Yes.

Q23: Is National Work Readiness certificate from Career Ready 101 a countable outcome?

A: ACLS no longer has a countable outcomes policy. The National Work Readiness certificate from Career Ready 101 does not count in terms of enrollment in a certificate program or postsecondary education.

Q24: Are there clear definitions of acceptable postsecondary training? What about Training Programs? What's counted?

A: WIOA uses "recognized postsecondary education" as an umbrella term which encompasses what counts for acceptable postsecondary education and training programs. From [WIOA](#): "The term "recognized postsecondary credential" means a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree."

Q25: Could we get a very clear definition of postsecondary training? For example, does completing a Personal Care Assistant certification program count as postsecondary training?

A: Entry into postsecondary/training refers to participation in a program leading to a "recognized postsecondary credential". According to WIOA: "'recognized postsecondary credential' means a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree."

Q26: What if the student's exit date is 12/18 of a year? Do they have only 13 days to enter PST?

A: Entry into Postsecondary Education/Training has a reference period which ends on 12/31 following the close of the fiscal year. Therefore, outcome obtainments concerning PSE/T will be checked for the student who exits on 12/18 during the reference period consisting of the rest of the fiscal year which ends on 6/30 as well as the months of July – December that fall after the close of the fiscal year (or 378 days; 379 days when leap years play a role).

Q27: What about students who raise their income in the second quarter, but do not exit?

A: The employment standards are currently still being developed. However, those standards when fully developed will only apply to exited students.

Q28: Who is responsible for tracking the enrollment in postsecondary education or training? I'm at a correctional facility and many of the inmates do not wish to share information like SSNs. Will we be penalized if inmates do not share information that allows us to track?

A: The program is responsible for tracking PSE enrollment. If a program does not have follow-up data, then the program will not meet its target. However, correctional institutions will likely have their own set of state performance standards separate from the community adult learning center (CALC) performance standards.

Q29: Is enrollment in postsecondary education/training determined by data matching, or by directly asking students if they enrolled in such education?

A: ACLS uses the [National Student Clearinghouse](#) to match records for enrollment in higher education. However, there is no system to match for training programs. ACLS encourages programs to follow-up with all exited students, even those likely to be data matched in order to capture as many outcomes as possible. SMARTT is being updated to allow programs to enter outcomes for all eligible students.

Q30: Can you touch base on the process to be used to follow up on employment and postsecondary outcomes. Also, who will be responsible?

A: Because the employment cohort is now significantly larger than in previous years, programs will need to be responsible for developing their own systems for following up on their students' employment and postsecondary outcomes. SMARTT screens are being revised to support this new requirement.

Q31: What is the scope of training programs that are considered?

A: According to WIOA: "‘recognized postsecondary credential’ means a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree." Any kind of training program that leads to one of the recognized postsecondary credentials will be considered.

Program-Design Questions

Q1. How do these standards affect program design policies? Will standards still be based on those who set them as goals? What are the options for tests? What do other states use for ABE/ASE assessments? 70% of our students are from college/career. How will we capture their gains?

A. ACLS will allow for more flexibility in the future around program design. Standards are not based on those programs that set them as goals. Many years ago, ACLS had a goals standard that was set up to give a percent of student goals met based on those that students set; however, that changed many years ago and ACLS separated out goals set from goals met. In the new accountability framework, there will not be a goals standard.

Q2. How will low-intensity programs be affected?

A. ACLS is running data on all types of programs. At this point, there is no clear disincentive for low-intensity programs other than in terms of EFLs; data show that high-intensity programs typically do better in terms of moving students to higher EFLs than low-intensive programs. ACLS will provide more information on this including showing data in the months to come.

Q3. If a student obtains his/her HiSET during the summer, do programs get credit for that in the next fiscal year or will it go with the last fiscal year that a student attends class?

A. Programs will receive credit during the last fiscal year that a student attends class.

Q4. WIOA changes will be impacting programs in FY17, the last year of our current grant cycle. In the past, major changes to program design have been discouraged within the five year plan. Our program has a large number of Family Literacy classes in this five year plan. Since the nature of family literacy classes seems to be changing dramatically, would ACLS consider allowing us to drop family literacy and use that money to intensify other parts of our programs?

A. This is a program design question that should be asked of your ACLS Program Specialist. Program plan changes should reflect the changing needs of your student population; ACLS does not discourage program plan changes if they are responsive to the needs of a program's population.

Q5. How to weigh number of instructional hours into EFL?

A. Programs should plan their design around the needs of students in their community. The number of instructional hours should be sufficient for students to make progress, make EFL gains, and achieve success in the program and beyond.

Q6. Will there be more flexibility in terms of program design in order for programs to meet these new standards?

A. Yes